

Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting
Thursday, July 9, 2015, Preston Community Center

Commissioners present: Nate Veranth, forest landowner (Chair), Bernie McKinney, Green River Coalition (Vice Chair); Dick Ryon, North Bend resident; Rex Thompson, forester; Sandy Miller, forest landowner; Brandy Reed, King Conservation District; Matt Rourke, forester; Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe; Doug McClelland, Washington State Department of Natural Resources

Guests: Grady Steere, Hancock Forest Management; Monica Paulsen Priebe, Green River College

King County Staff: David Kimmett, Parks and Recreation; Kristi McClelland, Forestry Program; Linda Vane, Commission Liaison

Chair Nate Veranth called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Motions

Motion 1- 0715 That the minutes of the May 14, 2015 meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff and Agency Reports and Announcements

Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Doug McClelland reported on recreation funding at the state level. This year the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust with the Washington Trails Association and others led a lobbying effort that resulting in enhanced capital funding for state DNR and state parks recreation, according to Doug. Much of the funding would be for the Snoqualmie corridor and the Raging River basins and included better access to trailheads, improvements in trail connections and enhanced bike trails. Additionally, in raising the gas tax the State Legislature also lifted the lid on the allocation for the non-highway off-road highway account. That would provide additional funding for recreation on state lands, said Doug.

Administration – Linda Vane reported on the process of filling four open positions on the commission. Interviews had been completed and new members will have been nominated by the time of next meeting.

King Conservation District (KCD) – Brandy Reed provided an update on the new Rural Forest Health Management and Urban Forest Health programs that are under development by the KCD. The former program would include a staff position to support rural forest education through Washington State University Extension Coached Forest Management Planning courses and other education. In addition, a new staff person would provide technical assistance to small lot private forest landowners with less than 5 acres of forest. The position will be filled some time this year. The KCD would also create a new staff position in the Urban Forest Health program. The KCD had been working with local jurisdictions to identify regional priorities for urban forestry that would allow the KCD to leverage resources for interjurisdictional initiatives such as street tree programs and open space stewardship. Moreover, the KCD had tripled the amount of funds available for cost share available to landowners who would implement forest stewardship plans or had received KCD technical assistance. Brandy said that even with this significant increase in the budget for this program, the funds would be fully allocated by the end of July, she explained. This signals that there is a need to increase the funding for this program if possible, said Brandy.

King County Forestry Program – Kristi McClelland reported on the Puyallup Watershed Initiative, which is underway in Pierce County. A group of nonprofit organizations had banded together to provide \$10 million in funding over ten years with the goal of providing the benefits of clean water for people. Unlike the traditional model where one entity takes charge and makes all decisions, perhaps with year to year funding, this approach saw that environmental problems are interrelated and that a meaningful solution would take years to establish, according to Kristi. She said that the initiative was built around “communities of interest” such as a forestry roundtable, transportation, agriculture, biodiversity, environmental education, and social and environmental justice. There were over a hundred organizations involved, said Kristi.

Kristi said that the forestry roundtable has looked at how changes in ownership may be affecting forest management practices. For example, said Kristi, analysis showed that over 40% of the forested land in the study area had sold to new owners in last 15 years and yet only one new landowner had joined the Washington Farm Forestry Association in that time period.

King County Parks and Recreation Division – David Kimmett reported on forest conservation on Vashon Island. He said that there are over 500 acres of forest in parcels of 20 acres or more in size in the southern part of the island. This includes Camp Sealth on which the county holds a conservation easement. David said that an issue for island residents and the county would be to determine a strategy for protecting forested land for development in the future as properties change hands. King County’s approach to land conservation generally includes a range of approaches such as conservation easements, current use taxation programs and fee purchase, he said. David added that Vashon Island had the highest enrollment per capita enrollment in current use taxation programs of any place in King County. David said that the county had also been working with the Vashon Island Land Trust.

A general discussion of land conservation objectives and strategies ensued. Doug McClelland commented that it would be useful to know what undeveloped 5 acre parcels could be developed in the future. The niche of King County Parks may be in conserving large forested tracks for parks in areas where future development is likely, he said. Brandy Reed said that given the proximity to downtown Seattle, the strategy should include an analysis of undeveloped properties and encouraged the county to consider developing a sustainable rural living approach that addresses both Vashon’s place as a bedroom community for urban areas and sustainable rural land management. She encouraged the county to build capacity among landowners to manage their own land for environmental benefits.

Sandy Miller initiated a discussion of alternatives to public purchase of lands such as transfer of development right and downzoning. Such alternatives keep land under private instead of public management and expense. Dick Ryon commented that on small lot forests, uneven aged management might be a useful approach for landowners who want to maintain their forested land while getting some financial value from property.

In conclusion David reported that a class of University of Washington forestry students had completed a 1,000 acre forest stew plan for KC Parks. They will report to Commission in the fall. He also reported that the Parks Division had put out their first RFQ for an on-call technical forestry services contract to provide is on-call support for the Parks Division’s forest stewardship program

Snoqualmie Tribe – Cindy Spiry reported that the Tribal Green Summit conference would be held in March 2016. She said there would be a forestry track and a habitat track among others. A priority for the Snoqualmie Tribe this year would be their Noxious Weed Control Program. They were working on updating their noxious weed survey program and would partner with King County on a knotweed control project on the Snoqualmie. They also received a grant to do a stream typing project with the Wild Fish Conservancy, she said. The project would start on Cherry Creek in Duvall and may expand, she said.

King County Wildfire Protection Planning – Linda Vane said that there had been a lot of concern with the potential for wildfire in this year of drought. She said that the Forestry Program calculated that about 1600 households were now implementing Firewise practices. In addition, as people became more aware of fire risk they were expressing interest in cooperating with King County Parks to reduce wildfire risk where homes are in close proximity to forested open spaces and parks.

Green-Duwamish Initiative – Bernie McKinney reported the Green River Coalition and Duwamish Cleanup Coalition had begun hosting meetings on the Green-Duwamish Initiative. Bernie has been representing the Rural Forest Commission at the monthly meetings. Other participants included Seattle City Light, UW Green Futures Lab and the King Conservation District, among others. He said that those involved showed a lot of excitement about collaborating. One of the first projects would be an interactive map that would make it easier for the public to see what restoration efforts were underway in the watershed and to participate in those efforts.

Bernie also reported that the American Farmland Trust would be coming to Enumclaw to do an \$18 million project on Newaucum Creek. At a recent meeting the Trust had shown evidence that the Green River Coalition's habitat restoration work on Newaucum creek had resulted in measurable improvements.

King County Comprehensive Plan Update 2016

Linda Vane, King County Water and Land Resources Division

Linda provided a brief report on the status of the Comprehensive Plan update process and timetable for the release of review drafts. She then facilitated a discussion of a list of potential Comprehensive Plan issues generated by the Commission at previous meetings and the County's adopted Scope of Work. There was extensive discussion on whether the restrictions on accessory dwellings or other forms of multiple housing units should be relaxed in the Forest Production District. The Commission also discussed aspects of biodiversity as a concept in policy and the findings of recent studies on means of preserving biodiversity on industrial timberlands during harvest. The commissioners agreed to consider holding a special meeting regarding the Comprehensive Plan Update in August should it be needed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on September 10, 2015, at the Preston Community Center.

Staff Liaison: Linda Vane, at 206-477-4842 or linda.vane@kingcounty.gov